

During a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting today on Capitol Hill, committee chair Rep. James Oberstar (D-Minn.) called for Department of Homeland Security to halt plans to expand the border crossing at Morses Line in Franklin County.

Oberstar's decision was swayed largely by the impassioned testimony of Brian Rainville, whose family owns a small dairy farm along the border. The DHS wants to buy 2.2 acres of the Rainville's land in order to build a new port. But the Rainvilles, claiming a potential loss of livelihood and questioning the need for the expansion, aren't selling.

Rainville was invited to testify before the committee by Vermont's own representative to Washington, Peter Welch. Vermont's congressional delegation has roundly criticized the expansion, which was originally slated to cost \$15.4 million and would require 10 acres of the Rainville's hayland. Earlier this week, Sen. Patrick Leahy sent a letter to DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano urging her to forgo the project.

In introducing Rainville, Welch called him a "real Vermonter," as was evidenced by his choice of red plaid shirt, sans tie. According to the press release from Welch's office — "Today a Vermonter was heard, and today a Vermonter made a difference," Welch said. "The process that led to this proposal has failed the family, failed the contractors, failed the community and failed the test of how Vermonters do business. I'm thankful to Brian for his moving testimony and to Chairman Oberstar for listening."

After Rainville's testimony, Oberstar pledged that he would follow his colleague in the Senate by sending a letter to Napolitano, calling for withdrawal of the project. "I think we'll be able to stop this," Oberstar said. Oberstar also called DHS a "monster," and reminded those assembled that he did not vote for its creation.

Below is Rainville's polished testimony. Keep in mind, he is not only a high school civics teacher, but he's also a drama teacher. If you don't feel like watching all 16 minutes, here are the highlights:

"Instead of need, we have an agency focusing on want. What they want to do is spend money.

What they need to do is leave us alone." (Zing!)

"We're trying to figure out why this agency is using eminent domain as a battering ram to our farm." (Ouch!)

"In testimony earlier this morning, we heard from someone who I believe was sitting at this very microphone and said 'Well, that's our protocol.' I'm sorry, this is my parents' livelihood and I believe that carries more weight." (Double zing!)

"There is no public good at Morses Line. There is no reason to spend money at Morses Line when they know that a gate and sensors and the Border Patrol keep this nation safe. And to have veiled this project under economic stimulus, eminent domain and national security is reprehensible in a democratic nation." (Snap!)

"Just last Saturday, they walked into our town hall, where local government representative have been asked the hard questions for more than 100 years, and they tried the same dog and pony show. And when their laptop crashed, taking down their presentation, explaining that this new facility would make us all safer and they had superior technology, I had to believe that karma was at work." (Snicker from crowd.)

"The public good is not the spending of stimulus monies." (And he's out!)